

- Hall's Program Would Reward Muck Soil Farmers who Engage in Responsible Conservation Practices -

- Hall Amendment Creates Conservation on Muck Soils Program That Would Support Hudson Valley Onion Growers -

Washington, DC – Today the U.S. House of Representatives passed the 2007 Farm Bill which included U.S. Representative John Hall (D-NY19)'s Conservation on Muck Soils amendment which encourages environmentally responsible practices on actively farmed muck soil land. Hall's amendment would reward onion growers in the Hudson Valley who engage in responsible conservation practices, as well as farmers in other parts of the country.

"Programs designed to further farmland protection are particularly important in the Hudson Valley, where population pressures and rising property values resulting from proximity to New York City have placed a tremendous strain on the farming community," said Hall. "Financial support from federal conservation programs is a key to ensuring that farmers in New York and the rest of the nation can continue to actively work and protect their land."

Hall's amendment would implement a Conservation on Muck Soils (COMS) program to meet the specific needs of muck land soil crops such as the onions grown in Orange County. The program would reward anti-erosion and cover crop practices while addressing shortcomings under the current Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to help encourage ongoing production. Hall, who met last week with Hudson Valley growers in Pine Island to discuss the Farm Bill, applauded the efforts of local farmers who brought the muck soils problem to his attention.

"My meetings with Orange County onion growers brought this problem to light, and they were extremely helpful in suggesting ways that the problem could be addressed," said Hall. "It became clear to me that muck soil growers in the Hudson Valley and across the country have specialized needs that can't be fully met by a one-size-fits-all federal program. Creating a program that recognizes the unique nature of farming on muck soil can help to make sure that we're taking smart, efficient steps to protect our water and soil and help keep farmers in business."

The existing CREP program attempts to prevent soil erosion and protect water quality through a program that allows voluntary retirement of farm land. In order to obtain conservation payments, the CREP program requires farmers to enter into 10-to-15 year agreements to remove qualifying land from agricultural production. In many instances, this aspect of the program has created unintended consequences, including the retirement of specialized, productive soil from farming and a lack of land maintenance leading to weed and pest threats on neighboring lands.

Muck soil is a special type of soil farmed to produce onions, potatoes, lettuce, celery, and other specialty crops. This soil develops a thick organic layer of topsoil that is highly vulnerable to erosion when the lands are exposed to air. The Hall amendment would attempt to acknowledge the vulnerable, sensitive nature of this soil with a tailored approach that improves on the current application of the CREP program.

Specifically, the Hall Amendment, which passed by a voice vote, would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a Conservation on Muck Soils (COMS) program that would make conservation payments to farmers who

- Are actively engaged in farming on muck soils
- Have a spring cover crop planted with the primary crop to prevent soil erosion
- Maintain a winter cover crop to prevent off season soil loss
- Have surrounding ditch banks seeded with grass on a year round basis to stave off runoff and erosion

H.R. 2419, The Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2007, which included the Hall Amendment, passed the House today by a vote of 231 to 191. The bill imposes real payment limitations that crack down on subsidies going to a handful of the largest corporate farms and redirects funds to a more regionally diverse array of family farmers and ranchers. The bill guarantees a historic \$1.5 billion in funding for fruit and vegetable programs that benefit the specialty crop growers of the Hudson Valley and have not received traditional Farm Bill benefits. It also makes significant new investments in conservation programs, including the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, that help New York farmers protect the environment and keep farmland from being sold into development.